

# ROC SALT 2018 Grant Report

## to the Grants Working Group of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley

March 5, 2019

### **What were you hoping to accomplish?**

Per our proposal, ROC SALT asked for and received \$3,000 to help fund staff compensation and program costs for the pilot phase of this designated mission of the Presbytery, including the delivery of 3 pilot mission groups in the summer of 2018 and to support the continued stabilization and growth of the South Wedge Food Program.

### **Who was touched by your project or program?**

In 2018, the mission immersion program involved:

- 164 participants and 15-½ days of service and learning together.
- 700 person-hours of volunteer service (plus 46 hours from Presbytery work day)
- 327 hours of experiential learning

We partnered with the following organizations to give them hands-on experience, learning, and theological reflection on issues of poverty and justice: Foodlink, Harbor House, St. Joe's, Free Store, Cameron, House of Mercy, South Wedge Food Program, Mary's Place, YMCA Teen Center, Rochester Resettlement Services.

ROC SALT gave valuable field education experience to an M.Div. student from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School: Michelle Allen (from Youngstown Presbyterian Church in the Presbytery of Western New York), and the mission immersion program benefited from her many ministry gifts and experiences, and continues to do so..

The South Wedge Food Program has continued to expand the number of people it serves, the number of community volunteers it utilizes, and the volunteer pool has stabilized in terms of quality experience and effective program delivery.

- Monthly number of people served (stats from December 2018):

Households: 323  
Children: 334  
Adults: 350  
Seniors: 147

- 75 Thanksgiving Baskets were packed and distributed, and a record 90 Christmas baskets packed and distributed.
- The pantry also got an A in our February Foodlink Inspection, thanks to the volunteers who took care of all the little details to make the pantry shine.

Although not anticipated when we wrote the proposal, the new nesting congregation at ROC SALT - Open Arms Metropolitan Community Church - is actively partnering with the mission immersion program and the food program, providing them new service opportunities, and positively influencing ROC SALT's facilities renovation plans to include restroom facilities that will be inclusive of people of all gender identities.

### **How did this grant energize or transform your congregation or community?**

According to one youth group advisor, participants of the Mission Immersion program reported that this concept introduces an immersive experience of something most "do not even have language for, or any understanding of, the privilege in which they live."

Another participant said, "It was the most satisfying project I have been involved in, working on items that would be obviously and immediately beneficial to the recipients."

### **What did you learn from this project and what are your next steps?**

Flexibility is the name of the game! In the mission immersion program, we learned that such sudden changes are normal for this work as those living in community with those on the margins often lack the luxury of planning very far in advance. Thus, we have to be always ready to reschedule teams to new work sites when cancellations came from the original service organizations. These changes as excellent opportunities to help our participants gain perspective on how much harder everything becomes in the context of poverty.

We've also learned more about the context of today's youth, who are often afraid to commit to a project for fear of missing out on something else. We are adapting our approaches to address this cultural reality.

We've learned that experiential learning pieces such as poverty or privilege simulations are key to rich and transformative experiences for mission participants.

Our mission immersion leadership has changed, with the departure of Laura Bachmann to pursue a different ministry calling. We have developed a new shared leadership model that brings together the complementary gifts of Tedd Pullano and Melanie Jones, with plans to more broadly engage people from the presbytery in planning programming.

We are also learning of opportunities to expand the ways we think about mission partnerships, and the need to look beyond "traditional" service opportunities to creative new ventures.

Lynette Sparks, ROC SALT Board Co-Chair